MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

SDU UNIVERSITY

School of Social Sciences, Business and Law

«Approved»
Head of Department
«Economics and Business»
PhD A.Abdrazakova
«09» 06 2026

THESIS WORK

« SOCIAL NORMS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL RISK-TAKING: INFORMAL CONSTRAINTS AND ENABLING RESOURCES AMONG SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS IN KAZAKHSTAN»

Specialty «7M04115 – Management»

Submitted by:
Assylkhan Serikov
Master's degree 2nd course (signature of the student)

Scientific advisor:
Ugur Choban
PhD Assistant Professor
Supervisor Academic degree (signature of the supervisor)

Kaskelen, 2026

CONTENT

LIST OF TABLES iv
LIST OF FIGURES v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS vi
ABSTRACT vii
1. INTRODUCTION 1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW 6
2.1 Bounded Rationality and Entrepreneurial Decision-Making 6
2.2 North's Institutional Theory: Formal and Informal Constraints 6
2.3 Social Norms: Definitions and Mechanisms 7
2.4 Entrepreneurship in Post-Soviet and Central Asian Contexts 9
2.5 Risk Perception, Social Stigma, and Business Failure 10
2.6 Family as Institution: Constraint and Resource 10
2.7 Reputation as Economic Capital 11
2.8 Literature Gap and Theoretical Framework 12
3. METHODOLOGY 14
3.1 Research Philosophy and Epistemological Position 14
3.2 Research Design 14
3.3 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews 15
3.4 Participant Selection and Sample 15
3.5 Ethical Considerations 17
3.6 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis 18
3.7 Trustworthiness 18
3.8 Data Processing, Translation, and Researcher Reflexivity 19
4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS 21
4.1 Theme 1: Failure as a Financial and Psychological Experience 21
4.2 Theme 2: Family as Constraint and Resource, with Gendered Ambivalence 23
4.3 Theme 3: Reputation as Economic Capital 26
4.4 Theme 4: Risk-Taking as Planned Learning under Bounded Rationality 28
4.5 Tracing the Four-Stage Mechanism: The Case of P1 30
4.6 Cross-Case Synthesis 32
5. DISCUSSION 34
6. CONCLUSION 37
7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 39

LIST OF REFERENCES 42
APPENDICES 45
APPENDIX A — INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 45
APPENDIX B — PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET 46
APPENDIX C — CONSENT FORM 46
APPENDIX D — CODING FRAMEWORK AND THEMATIC MAP 46
APPENDIX E — SELECTED ANONYMISED INTERVIEW EXCERPTS 47
APPENDIX F — REPORT OF UNIQUENESS 50

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Participant Characteristics 16

Table 3.1 Cross-Case Evidence by Theme (P1-P6) 32

Table 4.1 Coding Framework and Thematic Map 47

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 The four-stage analytical mechanism linking social norms to entrepreneurial decision-making 13

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
KZT	Kazakhstani Tenge
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
RQ	Research Question
SDU	Suleyman Demirel University
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

ABSTRACT

Within the groups of SME owners in Kazakhstan, the informal structures of kinship, reputation, and community do not merely stop or push the risk-taking of entrepreneurs. The way social norms influence entrepreneurial risk for SME owners in Kazakhstan happens because these norms change the appearance, the schedule, and the visibility of the risk-taking. It is observed by scholars that the same structures of family and community which make a choice feel dangerous to the society are the same structures that provide trust and money to make the risk-taking manageable. Many people believe that the binding effect of social norms falls on the shape of the risk-taking rather than on the amount of risk itself. While using the bounded rationality theory of Simon, the institutional framework of North, and the work about social norms from Bicchieri and from Cialdini and Trost, this study investigates a mechanism with four stages: Social Norms → Perceived Social Consequences → Risk Perception → Decision-Making.

This research follows an interpretivist way of understanding and an exploratory qualitative plan which uses six semi-structured interviews with SME owners from five different areas of business. Three different cases represent the retail sector so that the study can support theoretical replication within that sector. The information from the interviews was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis while the researcher used audio review and transcription methods. Experts claim that manual verification of selected parts and researcher reflexivity are necessary for this type of analysis.

The study found four themes which include failure as a financial and mental experience, family as both a barrier and a resource, reputation as economic capital, and risk-taking as planned learning. This main finding of the work shows an ambivalence mechanism that was traced through evidence to show how the same informal structures make risk-taking dangerous or manageable for SME owners in Kazakhstan. Entrepreneurial action is redirected toward forms that preserve reputation and are legitimate in the society because of these structures. It has been observed that these informal structures allow risk-taking to be seen as acceptable.

Keywords: social norms, informal institutions, entrepreneurial risk-taking, bounded rationality, Kazakhstan, SMEs, qualitative research, thematic analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Theoretical Background

Classical economic theory frequently portrays the entrepreneur as a utilitarian who assigns probabilities to possible future events, compares potentially expected gains with potential losses, and takes a rational, self-serving course of action. This image has given rise to very effective analytical instruments, but it is based on assumptions that do not adequately reflect societies in which the failure of the business means failure in the social, family and moral sphere. Business risk is not a private financial calculation in such places. It is also understood from audiences whose judgments have significance for future market opportunities, community trust, and family reputation (North, 1990; Cialdini & Trost, 1998). The current study is informed by two theoretical streams. First, there is the concept of bounded rationality, which Herbert Simon (1955) claimed that human decision making is limited because people lack the cognitive capacity and do not have all important information and are time constrained. Entrepreneurs do not optimize, they satisfice — make a decision that is good enough with the information and social feedback they have. Second, what Douglass North (1990) calls the informal constraints — norms, conventions, and codes of conduct reflected in culture and secured by social sanction — have a role in regulating economic behaviour, apart from formal rules such as laws, contracts, and regulations. In the absence of strong trust in state institutions, or an effective rule of law, North contended that informal institutions are frequently more enduring than formal ones. Whereas, Bicchieri (2006) describes a social norm as a behavioural rule which people are expected to comply with because they think others in their reference group do too. Norms, thus include enforcement mechanisms: compliance results in approval, and deviance, in social sanctions. Cialdini and Trost (1998) note that descriptive norms (beliefs about what most people do) and injunctive norms (beliefs about what most people approve or disapprove) influence one another simultaneously and both have a role in guiding behavior.

All of them imply that the social setting of the entrepreneur in terms of family expectations, community evaluations, and reputational factors is an important and under-researched type of constraints on risk taking.

Problem Statement

The dynamics are especially relevant in the context of Kazakhstan. The post-Soviet transitional economy, where both formal and informal social institutions are rapidly developing, and where informal institutions, based on Kazakh collectivist traditions, kinship-based trust networks, and notions of shame and honour, persist. The formal support infrastructure for SMEs is relatively developed in comparison to other regions, and has been run by the Damu Entrepreneurship Development Fund, the Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs and the Baiterek National Managing Holding. However, formal support is insufficient to explain why some SMEs' entrepreneurs are reluctant to take on debt, grow the business and experience any overt failures (Smallbone & Welter, 2012). Although there is a growing body of literature on entrepreneurship in emerging markets, little attention has been given to the specific type and extent of constraints and enablers on entrepreneurial risk-taking in Kazakhstan arising from informal social norms, rather than formal regulatory barriers. Current research on Kazakhstani and post-Soviet entrepreneurship tends to be on regulatory obstacles, access to finance, or the quality of institutions (Aidis et al., 2008; Estrin et al., 2006), and the informal institutional dimension which North (1990) argued is fundamental to entrepreneurship is relatively under-researched at the individual decision-making level. Social norms affect entrepreneurial risk not by increasing or decreasing the willingness to take risk, but by directing how, when, and where risk is taken, and what it is considered socially acceptable and appropriate; the very same sets of kinship, reputational and community relations that can make a decision socially dangerous can also provide the trust, advice, capital and legitimacy needed to make it manageable, so that the binding effect of norms is on the form and timing of risk-taking, and what it is considered socially acceptable and appropriate.

Financial calculation is still relevant, but, in this context it is mediated by an informal institutional landscape that is ambivalent, where the family, the reputation, the fear of failure and the community's judgement play simultaneously as disabling and enabling agents.

Research Question

The overall research question for this dissertation is: How do social norms influence entrepreneurial risk perception and decision-making of SME owners in Kazakhstan? This question is disaggregated into three analytical sub-questions.

1. Primary: How do perceived social consequences reshape the form, timing, and visibility of business decisions, as opposed to just increase or decrease risk appetite?
2. When do the same informal structures become obstacles rather than facilitators, and when do social-normative factors not come into play at all in the calculation of risk?
3. How SME owners in Kazakhstan would like to articulate the role of family, reputation, community judgement and failure stigma on entrepreneurial risk-taking?

Research Objectives

The study aims at four related goals: to understand how social norm pressure is experienced in the life of entrepreneurs in their decision-making processes in business; to explore the double edged nature of the family as a facilitator and a barrier to risk-taking; To examine the role of reputational concerns as economic capital in the market contexts of Kazakhstan; to bring a context-specific, empirical-based knowledge of informal institutions in Central Asian entrepreneurship.

Contributions

There are three major contributions to this dissertation. It theoretically extends North's institutional analysis to the individual entrepreneurial cognition by connecting the macro-level institutional analysis with the micro-level decision psychology using

the bounded rationality of Simon. Its core contribution is an empirically-traced redirection mechanism, conceptually. Family, community and reputation are all at the same time limiting and supporting factors. This dual effect is described in the four phases it passes through in concrete risk decisions (Social Norms → Perceived Social Consequences → Risk Perception → Decision-Making), as well as through a feedback loop that influences the social norms for subsequent decisions. Empirically, there are three improvements that come from the Kazakhstani material. First, this ambivalence can be gendered: the distribution of support and obligation in the family may vary according to who is responsible for the housework. Second, the family-as-resource is internally differentiated, that is, who holds advisory authority, such as, the older brother (аға) being an individual place of consultation for younger entrepreneurs. Third, reputation-as-capital is now a more and more platform-mediated way of becoming visible, particularly in retail and hospitality examples. The results have a practical value for the policy makers, financial institutions, and entrepreneurship educators looking to develop a more conducive environment for SMEs in Kazakhstan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Bounded Rationality and Entrepreneurial Decision-Making

Simon's (1955, 1957) model on bounded rationality is a complete departure from the assumption of perfect rationality of neo-classical theory. Human decision makers have three unassailable obstacles: limited cognition, lack of information, and a lack of time. Given these constraints, the decision-maker doesn't optimise, instead, they are satisfied, choosing the first alternative that is satisfactory instead of considering all possibilities. The notion of bounded rationality has implications for entrepreneurship. Heuristics are forms of belief and mental strategies that are used by entrepreneurs because they frequently have to manage uncertainty when making decisions – lacking market information – and limited resources – often scarce (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996; Busenitz & Barney, 1997). But one of the strongest of these heuristics are social reference points, which is what have others in the network done, what will others think of the decision and how will the community evaluate the person's success or failure? It is in this manner that social norms become part of the mind and cognition of entrepreneurial risk assessment rather than being external pressures or impositions. On this perspective, risk perceptions are not based on an objective evaluation of probability distributions but on the cognitive shortcuts available, and on socially transmitted signals received by the entrepreneur (Simon et al., 2000). A heuristic-based mode of decision making has been shown to exist among entrepreneurs compared to managers in large organisations, specifically due to the novel and non-routine nature of entrepreneurial problems, by Busenitz and Barney (1997). This suggests that the social cues and normative expectations have more influence on the entrepreneurial choice than the principles of the rational choice theory. Loasby (1998) argued that lower the complexity of decision environments, and the heuristics used by entrepreneurs are not necessarily being used on their own, but on a socially distributed basis among their networks.

2.2 North's Institutional Theory: Formal and Informal Constraints

Institutional Change and Economic Performance is the basic text on the role of rules, formal and informal, in the organization of economic activity. North distinguished between formal institutions (constitutions, laws, property rights, contracts, regulatory frameworks, etc.) and informal institutions (codes of conduct, norms of behaviour, conventions, self-imposed codes of ethics, etc.). North stated that informal institutions tend to be more enduring and less susceptible to change than formal institutions. Formal norms are rules that can be changed by legislation, informal norms change over time, as the culture, socialisation and repetition come into effect. This persistence has important implications: the informal institutional setting tends to stay the same even if the formal institutions change, as it did happen throughout post-Soviet Central Asia in the 1990s and 2000s, creating conflicts between the new formal rules and the older informal rules of the game (Roland, 2004). If two entrepreneurs are situated in the same formal setting, but different informal normative settings, they can thus be exposed to meaningfully different effective constraint sets (Williams & Vorley, 2015). North's framework has been extended by subsequent scholars. Helmke and Levitsky (2004) developed typology of the interplay between formal and informal institutions, focusing on situations where informal norms support, replace, supplement, and compete with formal rules. The concept of institutional asymmetry, which is similar to the one proposed by Williams and Vorley (2015), has been used here in the case of post-socialist Bulgaria, where the formal and informal institutions are not aligned, and entrepreneurs tend to move to the informal sector. All these relationships are in effect for Kazakhstani entrepreneurs, resulting in a complicated institutional environment.

2.3 Social Norms: Definitions and Mechanisms

While North labeled the informal guidelines as institutional constraints, the social psychologists articulated the micro level mechanisms where through norms operate the best. As per the influential account put forth by Bicchieri (2006), social

norm refers to a behavioural rule that an individual prefers to comply with, if he/she believes that sufficient number of persons in his/her reference network comply with that rule and expect him/her to comply also. The conduct of an agent who adopts standards of normality may make a cognitive assessment. Bicchieri distinguishes between empirical expectations (beliefs about what others do) and normative expectations (beliefs about what others think one ought to do). The two operate through different psychological pathways, but both lead to compliance. Cialdini and Trost (1998) draw a distinction between descriptive and injunctive norms as they complement Bicchieri. Those two can come apart: people can know that most other people engage in a behaviour (descriptive) that is nevertheless not socially approved of (injunctive). Researchers Cialdini and Trost argue that because injunctive norms engage moral emotions such as guilt, shame, and pride, they generally have stronger motivational force than informational cues. When applied to entrepreneurship, the distinction is particularly useful for understanding the social management of business failure. In Kazakhstan, failure to start up failures is descriptively common (many small businesses failed during COVID-19) and injunctively disapproved of (failure is read as personally shameful and on one's family). This divergence can result in complex behaviours, from continuing loss-making ventures to avoid leaving any markers of failure to structuring businesses in ways that leave a smaller reputational footprint. It is clear that social norms both promote and constrain entrepreneurship. Community embeddedness imparts to entrepreneurs significant local knowledge, social capital, legitimacy, and resource flows that are lost to those who operate beyond dense normative environments (McKeever et al., 2015). Family structures also offer capital, labor, advice, and more legitimacy in ways that formal market institutions cannot match (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). The present study's conceptual hinge pivots on the dual quality of norms as simultaneously constraining and enabling agents in social life.

2.4 Entrepreneurship in Post-Soviet and Central Asian Contexts

After the fall of the Soviet government in Russia, many researchers have studied the entrepreneurial activity present in a not-so-instituted environment. The same can be noticed when formal rules are enforced erratically and informal networks play a disproportionate role in the co-ordination of economic money (Aidis et al 2008; Estrin et al 2006). According to Welter and Smallbone (2011), the post-Soviet entrepreneur manages to develop an institutional bricolage that comprises both formal and informal institution's resources which are available at hand for goal. According to Smallbone and Welter (2012), there are important differences in the relationship between entrepreneurship and institutional change in the Commonwealth of Independent States, Central and Eastern Europe, and China. Therefore, they caution against interpreting the post-socialist world as a single context. Collectivist structures can strongly influence entrepreneurial behaviour, specifically in the Central Asian context. According to Dave (2007), Kazakhs were traditionally organized in zhuz (жүз) kinship networks. These networks can create both in-group solidarity and obligations to be loyal and return favours. The kinship networks can help to access informal credit, labour and market information that formal institutions do not provide. Also, these governing structures may impose restrictions on one's choices. This can happen as an obligation to consult family or community elders, share with extended kin, or avoid choices that may bring shame to the network. Investigation of entrepreneurship in Russia, Ukraine and the wider region in the transitional economies of Eastern Europe has begun to reveal the workings of such informal structures, including the gendered dimensions of these (Aidis et al, 2008; Iakovleva et al, 2013; Smallbone et al, 2010). According to Aidis, Estrin, and Mickiewicz (2008), in post-Soviet economies social capital derived from personal networks is more important than formal business plans and access to institutional finance for entrepreneurial success. The social aspects of entrepreneurship are at the centre of economic performance, not peripheral to it. The influence of such norms on risk

perception and decisions at the individual level remains under-researched particularly in the case of Kazakhstan – a gap the current dissertation addresses.

2.5 Risk Perception, Social Stigma, and Business Failure

The association between social stigma linked to business failure and entrepreneurs' willingness to take risks has received significant attention. The research conducted by Cardon, Stevens, and Potter (2011) shows that the cultural sensemaking, or interpretation, of an entrepreneurial failure will shape whether an individual attributes their failure as misfortune and therefore due to external or environmental factors or mistakes which are due to internal or personal deficiency with the individual. This attribution, whether it be to misfortune versus mistake, will govern the social and emotional aftermath of the failure.

In places where failure is thought of as a personal mistake rather than a bad luck, the social and emotional costs are more debilitating. So, entrepreneurs are more likely to structure to avoid risky but potentially high-value opportunities, and build defensive strategies to limit reputational exposure. Or even over-invest in failing projects to buy time to avoid the moment of public failure. Under collectivist cultural conditions, this mechanism may operate with greater potency, with personal status being not merely a personal asset but a status shared by one’s family and kin. Simon, Houghton, and Aquino (2000) showed that cognitive biases and risk perception affect whether the entrepreneur can start a company or not. In fact, often it is the perception of the risk and not the actual risk that matters. This work alongside Cardon et al. (2011) implies that reframing failure socially as learning rather than as evidence of incompetence is one of the core cognitive social tasks an entrepreneur must achieve to sustain risk-taking over time.

2.6 Family as Institution: Constraint and Resource

The family is at the center stage of entrepreneurship research. Aldrich and Cliff (2003) put forth a family embeddedness perspective, asserting that family systems

fundamentally influence the identification, assessment, and pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities. On the side of resources, family networks remain a crucial provider of patient capital, reliable labour based on trust and social legitimacy within community networks. Family members often play the role of informal advisors, suppliers of unpaid or underpaid labour, and guarantors of informal loans. In this sense, family is a form of social capital that can take the place of formal institutions where bank credit, professional advice and formal labour markets are not easily accessible. Family involvement comes with obligations, conflicts and decision-making pressures that don't necessarily serve the entrepreneur's economic interests. Family norms defining the parameters of acceptable risk – in particular, norms reflecting collective memory of challenging economic hardship, Soviet-era risk aversion or religious conservatism – function as informal veto constraints on entrepreneurial initiative, limiting the risk-return frontier open to the entrepreneur. Research into women entrepreneurs in transition economies documents how unequal domestic and caregiving obligations limit the time, capital, and risk tolerance deployed by women in their ventures. This is despite the fact that families also provide emotional support and advice (Iakovleva et al., 2013). Consequently, one finds it better to understand the family not as a uniform resource or like a uniform constraint, but more like an informal institution which works at the same time to offer protection and invoke discipline. Secondly, working through the empirical chapter, family advice was found not to be undifferentiated: authority within family is widely distributed, and for younger entrepreneurs in particular the older sibling may carry specific advisory weight distinct from parents.

2.7 Reputation as Economic Capital

Reputation refers to the social assessment of a person's past behaviours and future reliability. In both studies, it has been regarded as economic capital, traditions of sociology and economy Reputation acts as a substitute for institutional mechanisms where it makes sense if formal credit information systems are weak, if

contract enforcement through the law is costly, and if market participants rely on referrals through word-of-mouth. As established by Smallbone and Welter (2012), trust may often work as a substitute for formal institutions in transitional economies. Further, they also perform the coordinating and risk-reducing functions that formal mechanisms undertake in more impersonal markets. In Kazakhstan, for many of the owners of SMEs, reputation has certain economic gravity.

In environments where commercial transactions largely occur through personal networks rather than formal market mechanisms, the ability to maintain a reputation for reliability and honesty is not just a social necessity but a commercial necessity. The economic function of reputation also affects risk-taking behaviour. Entrepreneurs who have pumped resources in building their reputations may be more careful than reputation-poor entrepreneurs, because the loss of reputational capital if a deal fails can be large. To successful entrepreneurs who can present risk-taking as displaying confidence and ability, in accordance with a norm that encourages boldness, reputational motives will tend to cause risk-taking in one domain or another. Additionally, in modern retail and service-oriented businesses, reputation is increasingly visible, measurable and publicly aggregated via online reviews, marketplace ratings and social-media visibility. This extends the classical literature into platform-mediated digital visibility, with direct commercial consequences for firms whose customer flow is dependent on platform visibility.

2.8 Literature Gap and Theoretical Framework

The previous study has significant gaps. Despite the existence of individual bodies of research that investigate bounded rationality, informal institutions, social norms, failure stigma, family embeddedness, and reputation, the authors are unaware of any studies which systematically combine these phenomena into a coherent analytical framework that traces the mechanism through which social norms translate into particular entrepreneurial risk decisions in Kazakhstan. The current research seeks to fill this void by proposing and empirically testing a four-stage mechanism.

That is social norms to perceived social consequences to risk perception and lastly to entrepreneurial decision making. To begin with, social norms both descriptive and injunctive set the normative environment in which entrepreneurs operate. On the one hand, an entrepreneur may experience consequences relating to family shame and damage to reputation. On the other hand, they may be viewed with social acceptance and legitimized by society. Third, alters the risk perception, or the entrepreneur's view of the likelihood and impact of negative effects. Fourthly, changes in risk perception result in decision-making that is patterned but divergent from rational-choice theory, and is subject, as predicted by Simon, to cognitive limits and social heuristics. A significant theoretical innovation of this framework is its focus on ambivalence. The social structures which gave rise to normative restraints on risk taking also generate enabling resources – e.g. trust, capital, labour, advice, legitimacy – which reduce the effective risk of entrepreneurial action. The creation of the organization or industry does not predict the suppression of entrepreneurship. The same kinship, reputational, and community structures that render a decision socially risky also provide the trust, advice, capital, and legitimacy that make it manageable. Social norms among Kazakhstani SME owners bind the form, timing, and visibility that risk-taking takes. So, it is not so much by raising or lowering risk appetite that social norms shape entrepreneurial risk as by regulating whether and how risk happens at all.

Figure 2.1 The four-stage analytical mechanism linking social norms to entrepreneurial decision-making

SOCIAL NORMS	PERCEIVED SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES	RISK PERCEPTION	ENTREPRENEURIAL DECISION-MAKING
Family, reputation, community expectations	Approval / disapproval, shame, trust, legitimacy	How risky the decision feels	Avoid, delay, redesign, or take risk
CONSTRAINING PATH: social cost of failure, family pressure, reputational exposure	ENABLING PATH: advice, trust, labour, family capital, legitimacy		Feedback loop: outcomes reshape reputation, expectations, and future norms.

The model is intentionally sequential for analytical clarity, but the empirical analysis shows that constraining and enabling effects may operate at the same time.

For example, the same family network may produce perceived social consequences around failure while also providing advice, labour, and emotional support that reduce the practical risk of a decision.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Philosophy and Epistemological Position

This study adopts the epistemological position of interpretivist with a social-constructionist orientation. This means that social reality is not simply an objective, external factor. It is made real through meanings, interpretations and experiences of social actors (Schwandt, 2000; Bryman, 2016). The social construction of entrepreneurial risks is not in a purely objective sense. Research on the meanings entrepreneurs give to risk cannot be captured with survey instruments that have a given fixed vocabulary; they need to undergo approaches that enable participants to put, in their words, how they understand the social dimension of their decisions. This position directly impacts method choices. This implies that the paper requires methods that allow access to subjective experience and interpretive meaning-making, or in other words, qualitative methods which will yield that rich, contextualised data which we need in order to understand how social norms work. This would be within a specified cultural environment as well as institutional environment. The exploratory nature of the research further supports the choice of interpretivism. Due to the limited literature on this particular phenomenon in Kazakhstan, a meaning-centred strategy is deemed more suitable than a theory-testing variable-centred design.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design. The article takes a broad phenomenologically oriented conviction as it is interested in entrepreneurs' lived experience of risk, failure, family expectation, and reputation. Nevertheless, phenomenology is not employed here as a formal analytical approach. The reflexive thematic analysis is the formal analysing method which is used by analysing to identify and interpret patterned meaning across the interview material. The significance of this distinction is that the research does not claim to provide a

complete phenomenological account of entrepreneurial experience. I would examine how social norms affect risk perception and decision-making.

3.3 Data Collection

According to Brinkmann (2013) and Welter (2011), a semi-structured in-depth interview is the most widely used method for qualitative data collection in entrepreneurship research. Semi-structured interviews combine consistency and flexibility. All participants will be asked about pre-selected topics from a common interview guide; however, the interviewer also can ask follow-up and clarification questions to address issues that emerge in each participant's own experience. Response will be: the protocol for interviewing the respondents (Appendix A) is built upon the theoretical framework. The questions seek to cover four areas, namely, general entrepreneurial background and motivation; Experiences of risk and uncertainty in business decisions; the module on social relationships family, community, and reputation and experiences of business failure or severe setbacks. By relying on the four streams of the theoretical framework, the questions have been logically classified. Every interview happened in three phases. Initially, the interviewer establishes rapport with the participant. The latter deal with risk behaviour, family and community expectations and specific decision episodes. Participants broader to the third wider reflection. The interviews took place in-person or online, in the language of the participant's choice, and lasted 25-60 minutes in duration. Informed consent was received before and while audio recording.

3.4 Participant Selection and Sample

Subjects were selected on 'purpose sampling' basis i.e. a non-probability strategy in which the researcher deliberately selects people who have characteristics that will help to answer the research question (Patton, 2015). The recruitment process should be understood as purposeful and access-based rather than random: participants

were approached because their ownership or co-ownership experience made them directly relevant to the study's analytical aims.

The criteria for selection:

Participants needed to be either the owner or co-founder of an SME that operates in Kazakhstan, to have been in active operation for at least one year, to have faced significant decisions in business involving major risk and uncertainty, and to be willing to talk about their entrepreneurial experience regarding the social and family dimension. The aim analytically is not statistical generalization. Rather it is theoretical understanding. Limitations of the sample are explicitly dealt with in Chapter 6. The final sample consisted of six owner-managers operating in a few cities and five sectors, as summarized in Table 1. There are three contrasting cases in retail, deliberately chosen. A sole, mainly online reseller (P1), a multi-city floral chain (P5) and a one-store menswear (P6) business. This design enables within-sector theoretical replication: because the three retail cases differ sharply in scale, gender, and business model, observing the same mechanism in different forms across these cases provides a greater internal check on the proposed argument than would a set of cases drawn solely from different sectors. The rest of the cases include construction, fish processing, and hospitality keeping cross sector breadth.

Table 3.1 Participant Characteristics

Code	City	Sector	Business profile	Key feature
P1	Shymkent	Retail / e-commerce	Kaspi-based and offline stationery, cosmetics, gadgets	Prior bakery failure during COVID-19; solo woman entrepreneur
P2	Almaty / Dubai	Construction	Construction and repair; recent relocation to Dubai	International relocation; reputation-driven sector
P3	Astana / Shardara	Fish processing	Fish production, processing, and export	Family-labour business; inherited paternal discipline; export experience
P4	Zhezkazgan	Hospitality (café)	Independent speciality coffee shop	Early-stage venture; digital reputation management
P5	Almaty / Astana / Shymkent	Retail (floral chain)	Multi-city retail floral chain; 6-8 staff per store	Team-trust model; multi-city operations; major pricing-loss episode; platform-dependent sales
P6	Almaty	Retail (menswear)	Single-store men’s clothing business	Youngest participant; older brother (ara) as principal advisor; Instagram-dependent;

Code	City	Sector	Business profile	Key feature
				explicit honour/normative framing of risk

Note: Participants are anonymous and business names and personally identifying details have been removed or generalised.for the thesis, but they all gave the consent to use and reveal the personal and business names. Geographic labels indicate the participant's main business location and/or relevant operational geography. "Almaty / Dubai" refers to a construction entrepreneur whose business experience began in Almaty and whose recent strategic relocation to Dubai became relevant to the interview. "Astana / Shardara" refers to a fish-processing business whose operations connect the Astana market with Shardara-related production and supply networks. P5's floral chain operates retail outlets in three megacities.

Providing claims are framed as theoretically generative – rather than statistically representative – six is defensible for an exploratory, depth-oriented study using reflexive thematic analysis, though remains a small sample by the standards of some qualitative traditions. Braun and Clarke (2021) point out that, in reflexive thematic analysis, sample size is not a number but something that is dependent on data richness, research question and analytic goal. Accordingly, we will consider the six cases in question as a focused empirical basis for developing and illustrating a mechanism. By adding two more retail cases to the original four, we strengthen the analysis in a particular way. This way we convert retail from a single data point into a three-case cluster. We are then able to show that the same mechanism recurs within one sector and differs on the surface. Despite this, the study notes that a larger sample would be required to estimate prevalence in the Kazakhstani SME population.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards for SDU human research. Before any interview, consent was taken from every participant. The participants were briefed on the purpose of the study. They were told that they

can decline to answer any question and withdraw from the study at any point they like. The participants were also told about the confidentiality and data storage procedures. Usage of Codes: To ensure the anonymity of participant identities, codes have been assigned (P1–P6) and business names and identifying personal information are not disclosed. Audio recordings, transcripts created using AI, interview memos, and translated excerpts will all be securely stored. Only stored accessed by researcher and supervisor. They will be destroyed after completion of the research. The interviews discussed delicate topics, such as business failure and family. Participants were reminded that they could skip a question if faced with pressure and financial risk.

3.6 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The data analysis was performed utilizing reflexive thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke. RTA enables the creation of flexible and rigorous themes across qualitative datasets and is flexible enough to accommodate an interpretivist epistemology in a relatively easy manner. The analysis carried on through the six phases of Braun and Clarke. During phase 1 (Familiarisation), the researcher engaged in the repeating reading of the text and listening of the audio. During Phase 2 (Generating Initial Codes), the data was systematically coded for semantic and latent meaning. In Phase 3 (Searching for Themes), the codes were placed together in groups to form candidate themes. In Phase 4 (Reviewing Themes), candidate themes were examined and refined in relation to the data. In Phase 5 (Defining and Naming Themes), the definition and name of each theme was established. As writing up, the themes were written up as interpretative accounts integrating data extracts with theoretical interpretation. Coding was conducted in two passes. Through an initial inductive pass, emerging themes and participant differences were identified. A deductive pass, on the second round, applied the four-stage theoretical framework to the data and checked the core mechanism across the six interviews. The framework that had already been developed from the first four

interviews was used to code the two further retail cases. This was to check whether the themes produced in this initial case set would hold up to new material or whether they were artefacts of this initial case set. The analytic claims are strengthened without sacrificing the exploratory character of the study, thanks to inductive openness and deductive discipline.

3.7 Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba 1985 the trustworthiness consists of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Multiple audio re-listening after prolonged engagement in data synthesis enhanced reliability. During interviews, clarification checks were made as meanings were ambiguous. We must not understand the clarification checks to be a kind of full-fledged post-interview member checking of transcripts, but rather immediate meaning checks in the interview setting. The thickness of description concerning participants and contexts provided in this chapter and the next enhances transferability. Full interview audio, transcripts, and coding materials are available for inspection to ensure dependability. Throughout the data analysis, a reflexive audit trail was maintained to support confirmability.

3.8 Data Processing, Translation, and Researcher Reflexivity

The fact that the interviews were conducted in Kazakh and Russian and the dissertation is written in English the move across languages becomes an important part of the analysis. The initial review of the audio files was carried out in their original language to preserve context, tone, and meaning. The transcriptions and interview memos were potentially useful but were not considered final analytical data on their own. The researcher compared the relevant sections to the audio recordings, amended any clear errors in the transcript, and translated several sections into English for the findings chapter. These authors noted that concepts which participants used in

responses – reputation, shame, confidence, family advice, responsibility, and indigenous normative terms such as honour (намыс) – do not necessarily have a one-word equivalent in English. Thus, this was a necessary step. Translation was, therefore, viewed as an interpretive act rather than a mechanical substitution of terms, and where a participant's framing turned on such a term, the English rendering is flagged as an interpretive translation in the text. It was also necessary to differentiate between summary and evidence in the analysis The automatically generated notes of the interview helped with the identification of the main themes dealt with by the participants, although this was not conclusive. The final interpretation derived from repeated review of the audio material and selected quotes. Direct quotes in the dissertation only where the actual wording was verified against the audio; where the verification is based on the audio and memo material but the full verbatim was not verified.

As rendering was not established, the participant's account is carefully analytically paraphrased instead of placed in quotes. The distinction is applied transparently in chapter 3: for example, the menswear case (P6) is reported predominantly in paraphrase while quotations are reserved for excerpts where the wording has been cross-checked with the recording. This approach allows the study to be transparent while avoiding false precision through the automatic generation of transcripts that are assumed to be fully verbatim. The supervisor was consulted regarding the use of AI-assisted tools as per the expectations of the institution of the responsible use of these tools in research. Due to extensive cultural familiarity with both the participants and the Kazakhstani entrepreneurial environment, researcher reflexivity was necessary. Having an insider position had practical advantages. For example, participants could discuss issues of family expectations, reputation, and social judgement with examples they found culturally familiar. Similarly, I was in a position to know meanings that an outsider would not. Insider status can lead to taking certain ideas for granted, while at the same time running the risk of assuming these ideas are shared by everyone. To mitigate this risk, the analysis asked

repeatedly whether each interpretation had been shown to be grounded in what the participant was actually saying, whether other valid readings were possible, and whether the pattern appeared in more than one interview. The coding and theme development process was documented through reflexive notes.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The results of reflexive thematic analysis of six semi-structured interviews with Kazakhstani SME owners' analysis yielded four major themes supported by evidence from different participants: experiencing failure as a financial and psychological event; family as both constraint and resource; reputation as economic capital; risk-taking as learning through planning under conditions of bounded rationality. Each theme is showcased along with participant extracts and interpreted in light of the four stage framework discussed in Chapter One. Regarding the research questions, the descriptive sub-question is addressed through all four themes; the mechanistic and boundary sub-question is taken up in the cross-case synthesis (Section 3.6); and the directional sub-question, being the main interest of the study, is traced explicitly through a single decision in Section 3.5. The three retail cases (P1, P5, P6) should be read together within each theme to demonstrate how the same mechanism takes different forms within a sector. The subsequent section, 3.5, will follow through a single case the full four-stage mechanism and show how the stages connect in practice. According to the method outlined in section 2.8, the analytical paraphrase is the account of P6, while the direct quotations are from cases where the wording was already verified against the audio.

4.1 Theme 1: Failure as a Financial and Psychological Experience

The failure of a business is an experience that goes much beyond that of its financial dimension. For P1, the closure of her bakery during COVID-19 was not a balance-sheet event. Instead, it had a lasting psychological impact on her, which changed the way she assessed risk, prepared for the market, and managed her emotions going forward. She stressed that more often than not, the binding constraint on entrepreneurial action is fear rather than the materialisation of financial risk: "If a person can overcome their fear and build confidence in themselves in taking a risk, then success will definitely follow because fear is behind taking a risk" (P1,

translation from Kazakh). P2 expressed a similar position, albeit from a different angle. One can learn through failure but it can also blemish the reputation of a person. In his opinion, the outcome of one project does not determine the fate of the business as a whole. But after a failure damage can be affected. Frames failure as a step, not the end. “To me, it means a new opportunity – simply moving to the next stage, the next time. "Failure taught me something.” (P2, translated from Kazakh) P3 added a temporal dimension. The fish processing industry faces operational risks due to seasonal supply, non-payment and export uncertainty. Due to his experience, P3 was able to differentiate between permanent failure and temporary setback. This distinction allowed him to take risks at any time. The same difficulties he presented to his family and employees were not evidence of incompetence but part of the learning process.

Brought another lens to view what otherwise would be viewed as a poor investment: a miscalculation in the financing of equipment was not recounted as a losing investment but rather a lesson in controlling his feelings. This framing is aligned with the cultural-sensemaking accounts of entrepreneurial failure (Cardon et al., 2011). These two retail cases illustrate this theme more sharply as these cases describe failure in concrete operational and financial terms while the explanation of failure is located in the psychological and social register. The multiyear floral chain operator P5 made someone recount opera who got losses in first year structural cash-flow trap. In 1st year we got losses. These resulted from unexpected situations. For example, goods come from suppliers, but when the goods arrive, you’ve already sold them on credit, and by the time you need to pay, you don’t have the money.” (P5, translated from Kazakh) More revealing than the loss itself was how P5 narrated recovery from a substantial pricing failure. The occurrence, where products with a short shelf life had to be sold at a loss, was characterized as a learning experience by management, which treated this incident as an experiential test which the business passed.

The study contemplated the loss of the peonies and tried a few things. Despite being psychologically impacted, we stood our ground. By paper, it has learnt that and moved on with a different strategy. (P5, translated from Kazakh) P5's phrase 'we were psychologically affected, but we did not give up' is analytically important. The action of sensemaking that Cardon et al. (2011) describe is the active reframing of failure from mistake (evidence of incompetence) to misfortune-with-a-lesson. This is what happens here, but in a sector where there are hard material losses rather than the more dispersed failure narratives of constructions and fish-processing. At the other end of the scale is P6, the youngest participant, who presents the limiting case. To date, he has experienced no major failure, and he identified seasonal unpreparedness as his main risk. He noted that preparation and flexibility buffer the problem, preventing small issues from becoming failures. When you read those three retail accounts together, you get a useful range – from anticipated-but-not-yet-realised failure (P6), through to survive major loss reframed as learning (P5), to foundational failure that reorganised a whole approach to risk (P1).

In conclusion, in Kazakhstan, business failure has a social and immoral meaning and this context refers to the injunctive social norms surrounding small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). If the cost of failure incorporates shame, reputational harm, disappointment to the family and loss of pride, it means the risk calculation of the entrepreneur incorporates social cost. Orthodox economic models do not take this into account.

The main analytical point is that entrepreneurs do not only ask whether a decision can produce profit or loss; they also ask what the decision means if it fails in public. An entrepreneur may interpret a failed venture as an experiment in the marketplace, while relatives or community members may see this as irresponsible behavior. The point at which economic meaning and social meaning differ is precisely where the risk calculation starts to incorporate norms. This corresponds to the second stage of the framework, which states that anticipated social and psychological consequences of failure influence decisions before failure occurs.

4.2 Theme 2: Family as Constraint and Resource, with Gendered Ambivalence

While all six participants reported family to be pivotal in their decision-making, the role of family was not consistent in all cases. For P3, family was a resource on which he relied in the formative years. His entry into the fish business was inspired by his father and grandfather's experience, and the initial phase of the business depended on intensive family labour. The strictness of the discipline of the activity I am doing now was inherited from my father, as he was very strict. Because of that strictness, because of that discipline – that discipline stuck with us too.

The family, as an essential support network, gives us discipline, effort, money and experience, which is exactly what those families glued to networks show. (P3, translated from Kazakh) the resources expert researchers observe is characteristic of a regional embedded-entrepreneurship. (P3, translated from Kazakh) For P2, the family was an advisory resource used for big strategic decisions. His decision to move operations to Dubai, which was a family discussion, gave him the confidence to make an international move because of family advice, "The role of the family is very important. Combining my own knowledge and experience with theirs to make a decision." He did not see family input as a constraint but as a way of reducing risk i.e. providing know-how, advice and emotional comfort to manage uncertainty in large strategic movesP2. The family role for P1 was more ambivalent, and in a way that the family-embeddedness literature suggests is strongly gendered. P1's family were very sincere in emotional support and consultation, but she adds that as a woman entrepreneur she faces asymmetric obligations: "I have many tasks balancing children, home, and household. Due to these occurrences, the staff is sometimes unable to fully concentrate on their assigned tasks.

This single account has two features. According to the first perspective, family can be conceptualized as an emotional and consultative resource. According to the other, family is a structure of asymmetric obligation. P1's same family context that assists her also places unequal demands on her at home and in caregiving that will

directly impact on the time, capital and risk appetite she can deploy in the business. This is not just an added "gender issue" to the overall theme on family. The data suggests the ambivalence of family is itself gendered, with the transfer of support and constraint depending on who is expected to carry household responsibility. This finding corresponds with literature on women entrepreneurs in transition economies, which shows how gendered domestic obligations limit the resources women can devote to their ventures even when families are otherwise supportive (Iakovleva et al., 2013). Accordingly, any account that treats family embeddedness as uniformly beneficial needs to qualify this claim. Because P1 is still the only woman in the sample, I treat this gendered reading throughout as a cautious single-case refinement rather than a population-level claim; the two additional retail cases do not extend it, since both are male. The two supplementary retail cases have something different to offer to the family theme; they show that family-as-resource is internally differentiated by who within the family holds advisory authority. P5 is the co-founder of his floral business and started it off with his older brother. He described family influence as decisive, but also mentioned disagreement within that relationship: "Family factors a lot in the decisions I make. Conflict occurs when I don't seek permission from my brother and start making my own choices." I have spent nearly six years in Almaty. We launched the store when we opened it with my big brother. In the beginning, I doubted it. At present we've separated a bit. My brother was skeptical about some of the decisions we made." (P5, trans. from Kazakh) Noteworthy is that P5 located the support of his family, not in a detailed understanding of the business, but in backing him without conditions through hardship – a difference which matters for how family functions as a resource.

The family was not very aware. They are uncertain about the specifics. It was challenging. The view of the world is much more textured than "family matters." P5's older brother (aғa) is at once co-founder, principal interlocutor, and source of friction. The wider family helps out emotionally but doesn't understand operationally. (P5, translated from Kazakh) While the resource exists, its differentiated nature means

strategic consultation flows via the sibling relationship, and moral backing rather than business judgement from the larger family. P6, the youngest participant in the group, reiterates this pattern in their account. P6 said that they called their older brother their chief advisor while family gave them moral support and encouragement but insisted that most of any decision always remains with them. In other words, it is estimated that about 70% of a decision is theirs personally while brother's early advice and parents own life experience influence the surrounding judgement. As a result both retail cases refer to the same extra refinement: for the younger entrepreneurs the older sibling 'plays' a specific advisory role within the family, which gets obscured by the generic label of 'family'.

P4 displays a different pattern. Before opening the café, he consulted his broader social environment family among others to see if the idea was realistic and socially meaningful. Consulting here was a cognitive complement to bounded rationality: not able to calculate the optimal venture, the entrepreneur drew on socially distributed knowledge to reduce uncertainty before resource commitment. For all six instances, family seemed to develop as a normative environment creating expectations and obligations and as a material and cognitive resource that lowered uncertainty. The capacity of family ties to both shield individuals and discipline their moral conduct is not uniformly applied; it depends on the gender of the individuals. These ties are differentiated by authority over advisers. This complexity resistance and duality of family embeddedness is one of the major empirical findings.

4.3 Theme 3: Reputation as Economic Capital

In all six interviews, reputation was regarded as an economic resource rather than simply a social asset. This is particularly evident in P2's construction business. Construction contracts are big ticket items, of long duration and highly visible. A firm that is not trustworthy and credible will find it difficult to secure new contracts. Consequently, P2 characterized reputation not as something apart from business performance, but as something that is constitutive of business performance, whereby

he built a record of reliability through smaller projects and transparent communication to get larger ones. P3 noted a similar trend in the fish business where trust with its clients is an asset and is built through the delivery of a good product as well as honest communication on pricing and quality. Entrepreneurial confidence rests on external credibility, according to Davidson.

"If you lose confidence in your business, your business dies. According to P3 (translated from Kazakh), "If you yourself do not believe in it, who will believe in it?". This line of argument is consistent with the evidence that trust can substitute for formal institutions in transitional economies (Smallbone & Welter, 2012). The retail and hospitality cases take the argument decisively into platform-mediated visibility, and the two further retail cases make this the best-evidenced sub-theme of the study. P1 now sells online as their reputation is becoming measurable digitally. Their ratings, customer opinions, and platform visibility all influence access to customers, while a bad review will impair future sales. P4's café case shows that reputation operates through community networks and simultaneously through social media and customer reviews. As a result, a single positive or negative customer experience may achieve wide circulation. The flower chain pictures demonstrate the platform's reputation's commercial logic. He explained that a major reason behind businesses migrating online instead of offline is rising costs and the reach.

With online sales growth, offline stores struggle for sales. Online services are getting more famous in Almaty and Astana. Many shops are falling short as rental fees continue to rise. Individuals are migrating to the internet for sale. (P5, English translation from Kazakh). Most importantly, P5 understood presence on platforms as not just a sales channel, but a force multiplier for reach that is equivalent to a much bigger physical footprint: We're working with platforms online. The potential reach of 30 stores awaits us if we work with Kaspi and similar platforms. Our platform is well-known in the Muslims' community." (P6, translated from Kazakh) In our explanation, visible and well-established reputations translate into visibility, the digital depiction of recognition or presence. A well-known logo on a milk carton

would not escape attention. P6 reiterates the same logic using paraphrase. Instagram is the main venue through which the business is built and personal reputation is managed for his menswear business. He views responsiveness to customers and continuous online presence as integral to credibility. While he sees negative comments as a signal worth monitoring and managing, he does not get derailed by these. Reputation is therefore, along the relational asset built through word of mouth, an asset that is being generated, monitored and put out through screens more than ever in P1, P4, P5 and P6 – a change that has direct repercussions for how these entrepreneurs identify and manage risk. Cross-case analysis indicates that reputation works as economic capital across a variety of sectors and varying degrees of formality. Decisions that seem conservative from a financial perspective can, in fact, be completely rational when reputational implications are factored in: the entrepreneurs are not simply avoiding the risk, but creating a barrier around the relational asset which the business depends for its existence. According to the interviews, sometimes the reputational risk is more serious than a financial short-term loss. The reason being, financial loss is rectified with infusion of capital or.

Reorganization may happen due to distrust in a future opportunity. -Taking all those things into account, participants had the tendency to prefer the staged, cautious, or reputation-preserving strategies even when the aggressive and rapid expansion was likely to generate higher returns.

4.4 Theme 4: Risk-Taking as Planned Learning under Bounded Rationality

The interviews showed that there was a common conception of risk-taking itself. All participants described risk as a conceptual and manageable process that offers plenty to learn. Furthermore, they linked the learning process to prior knowledge, market observations, and advice-seeking. P1 asserts this view unequivocally: “If a person is sufficiently knowledgeable in the chosen field of business, that person will be more sure of taking risks.” (P1, translated from Kazakh). This framing links fear of risk to gaps in knowledge and psychological barriers (e.g.

lack of confidence) rather than only to objective financial dangers. Such a view is consistent with bounded rationality theory (Simon, 1955) and with accounts of heuristics as ecologically rational responses to informational complexity (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996). P3's experience within the fish industry showed the same logic from a perspective of obligation.

When employees count on the business for their livelihoods, risk-taking that might otherwise be discretionary becomes structurally necessary: “If revenue does not come in, the company’s operations and the workers’ salaries are at risk. On occasion, we have no choice but to take action” (P3, translated from Kazakh). P2’s account of the move to Dubai served to reinforce the framing of risk as assessed rather than spontaneous, based on family consultation, accumulated experience, and an evaluation of a long-term opportunity: “Without risk, one cannot reach great success. After careful consideration with family, she made the decision to leave her homeland for Dubai. There were long comments regarding her post and such.

P4 added the dimension of emotional regulation and preparation: “Don’t give in to emotions. Quantify them.” Create an agenda, break the barriers, strengthen yourself. The most important thing is: research and learning first. (P4, translated from Kazakh) P5’s account is particularly useful for this theme because it shows the planning explicitly weighed against the temptation of quick returns. According to this intuition, prices of risky assets will be lower than the prices of relatively safe assets, but not by too much. It is what we require. Higher risk yields higher returns. What we require is stability and long-term planning, not only the cash flow.” (P5, translation from Kazakh). The qualification of P5 not only cash flow, unmistakably captures the theme as it is. Although we recognize that risk is the engine of profit, we wish to subordinate it to planning and stability, rather than thus pursue it. The additional store that he opens specifically to procure cheaper supplies, and his insistence that location choices are made following an analysis of population and purchasing power, are cases of risks treated as a research event or a staged event rather than a gamble. The P6 has been most explicitly culturalising of the theme, it is reported here in paraphrase with

particular care because it involves an indigenous normative notion that does not translate cleanly. Risk-taking ensues out of being bold, but it also takes preparation. The client's boldness is not impulse, but rather normative. For example, a merchant acts on impulse when he does not take account of risk, while if he sees the risk and yet goes ahead, his act of going ahead with the business is a bold one. Further, boldness in business is respectable (намыс) and this is religious as well as communal. The surrounding mentality modifies how much risk a person feels he is permitted to take. This is significant from an analytical angle because the place within the dataset where the participant names the indigenous normative vocabulary that the other interviews leave implicit. The injunctive norm must be inferred from behaviour everywhere, except where P6 articulates it. The point shouldn't be over-extended.

The notion of honour as risk is felt and voiced by at least one young entrepreneur – the normative framing of risk that is articulated is of honour – this does not indicate that all entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan experience risk through this case. Rather, it grounds in speech the link between social norms and risk perception that the framework posits. aThe crucial analytical point is not just that participants characterise their risky behaviour as planned; almost any entrepreneur will present decisions as considered, not reckless but that the planning they describe is socially distributed. The same family, sibling, team, and community networks that create normative pressure, also offer knowledge, counsel, and reference points that help make risk feel manageable. P5's dependency on his brother and team, P6's dependency on his аға and on a community sense of honour, P2's dependency on family counsel, and P4's pre-launch consultation are all instances of the same structure: risk assessment is not a cognitive act of an individual alone but rather a socially embedded one and for precisely this reason it belongs within an account of how rules enter decision-making. In these narratives, taking risks was presented as learned behaviour aided by other people rather than personality traits. A cognitive bridge that links the social-normative context to the perception of risk relies on specific capacities. These capacities are both of the right type and cultivation. This

cognitive bridge consists of knowledge, advice-seeking, market research, team trust, and emotional regulation. When entrepreneurs develop these capacities, they can take risks that the surrounding normative environment might not allow. This evidence thus supports a dynamic view of risk, whereby it is not simply accepted or avoided; it is interpreted, reduced, postponed, shared, narrated. The strategies of entrepreneurs to reduce uncertainty are compatible with bounded rationality, because they enable entrepreneurs to act despite uncertainty without claiming to have complete information, and with institutional theory, because the strategies are influenced by informal norms of responsibility, credibility, discipline and social approval.

4.5 Tracing the Four-Stage Mechanism: The Case of P1

In order to illustrate the interconnectedness of the four stages in practice – rather than just their co-occurrence – it is useful to trace a single decision through the full mechanism. P1, whose bakery closed due to Covid-19, shows the stages of e-commerce decision-making in turn on the matter of whether and how to re-enter business. At the early phase, social norms create the environment. P1 complied within an injunctive norm that sees visible business failure as personally shameful and as reflecting on the family, and within gendered norms that allocate primary responsibility for children and household to women. As the second stage, these norms generated perceived social consequences such that re-entering business and failing again would compound earlier shame, while the domestic obligations she described meant that any new venture would have to be compatible with caregiving demands. At the third stage, she altered her risk perception due to these perceived consequences. The major risk, according to her, wasn't how much money was involved but the fear of having a second visible failure and the fact that one can't commit full attention to the business – she noted "fear stands behind risk-taking." At the fourth stage, this risk assessment affected the decision itself: she chose a lower-visibility, lower-overhead online model as opposed to another shopfront, and framed the move as a knowledge-based, planned step rather than a risk. In this case,

the two things at once are clear and definite. The family, which imposed asymmetric obligations, also provided emotional support and consultation during the same period which made re-entry possible. Thus, the network which binds the constraint, is simultaneously the network which provides the enabling resource. This case in itself directly illustrates the ambivalence of the mechanism at play: norms do not suppress the risky behaviour of P1, but reorient it in a network compatible, reputation protecting form of risky behaviour. A floral chain of P5 provides another illustration of this mechanism, operating through another structure. The injunctive norm presented here suggests that it is less about shame based on gender than the reliability and reputation of a market and family network. The consequence ascribed to the pricing failure of the peony was in financial terms and a.

The entrepreneur and his co-founding sibling both experience the psychological impact together. The founder's perception of the risk changed but instead of withdrawing from the undertaking, they re-strategize and purposely pivot towards a platform reach. Most interestingly the family network may not "understand the nitty gritty" yet were instrumental in "driving the decision to continue". The mechanism of reproduction observed in two retail cases having widely differing structures – a solo woman re-entering business, and a male sibling partnership scaling a chain – is precisely the within-sector replication that the six-case design was meant to provide.

4.6 Comparative Case Analysis.

The cross-case comparison supports the study's argument that the various themes are not stand-alone participant stories. Support for every theme comes from evidence provided by many different participants. The sectoral differences clarify how the same mechanism takes different forms across contexts. The three retail cases show it recurring within a single sector. In addition, this comparison illustration shows the boundary of the argument. Namely, social norms don't determine decisions in a mechanical way. For instance, P2 and P4 mainly described advice and social

feedback as resources for idea testing and uncertainty reduction rather than as direct pressure. P5 stressed market analysis and supplier strategy alongside social considerations. A partial counterpoint is important in that it prevents the analysis from treating informal norms as all coercive. The strongest interpretation is that norms don't always constrain risk, but rather that they structure the conditions under which risk is legitimate, manageable or socially dangerous.

Table 4.1 Cross-Case Evidence by Theme (P1-P6)

Theme	Evidence across the six cases	Interpretive significance
Failure as financial and psychological experience	P1: bakery closure; fear and confidence after failure. P2: failure as a learning and reputational hazard. P3: distinguishes setback from business death. P4: equipment decision framed as emotional learning. P5: first-year cash-flow losses and a major pricing loss reframed as learning. P6: no major failure yet; seasonal unpreparedness as principal risk.	Failure is evaluated through social and psychological meaning, not only financial loss; retail cases show this even where losses are hard and quantifiable.
Family as constraint and resource	P1: support plus gendered household obligations. P2: family advice supports international relocation. P3: family discipline and labour structure of the business. P4: social consultation tests the idea. P5: older brother as co-founder, interlocutor, and source of friction; family supports without understanding details. P6: older brother (аға) as principal advisor; approximately 70% of the decision retained personally.	Family reduces uncertainty but also creates obligations; the resource is gendered and differentiated by who holds advisory authority.
Reputation as economic capital	P1: platform ratings and customer trust in e-commerce. P2: reputation central to construction contracts. P3: client trust and confidence sustain trade. P4: digital visibility and reviews shape customer flow. P5: migration to online; platforms as "30 stores' worth of reach." P6: Instagram as the primary platform for building a business and managing reputation.	Reputation operates as a commercial asset across sectors and increasingly through platform-mediated digital visibility.
Risk-taking as planned learning	P1: knowledge and psychological readiness reduce fear. P2: Dubai move framed as assessed risk. P3: operational risk tied to salaries and continuity. P4: planning and emotional regulation guide decisions. P5: risk-return acknowledged but subordinated to stability and long-term planning. P6: risk as courage plus preparation, framed through honour (намыс) and communal identity.	Risk is treated as a learned, socially distributed competence rather than impulsive courage; P6 names the indigenous normative frame explicitly.

The table also shows why the study's contribution is not simply the identification of four themes. The contribution lies in connecting these themes into a

mechanism: norms shape anticipated consequences; anticipated consequences alter how risky a decision feels; and that altered perception shapes whether entrepreneurs avoid, delay, redesign, or pursue a course of action. The six-case evidence base makes that mechanism more robust, because each theme is now supported across a wider and partly within-sector set of cases.

5. DISCUSSION

This finding engages directly with the argument of Chapter 1. Social norms make risk-taking by Kazakhstani SME owners less a matter of raising or lowering risk appetite than of changing the form, timing and visibility of risk-taking: what makes a decision feel socially dangerous the same kinship, reputational and community structures, also provides the trust, advice, capital and legitimacy that make it manageable, so that the binding effect of norms falls on the shape of the risk rather than its level. Family networks, which create normative obligations, also provide capital, labour, advice and emotional support. Reputational structures that cause the failure's social costs also provide the trust that enables long-term relationships. The community norms which constrain some risks also cut down on uncertainty as they provide socially endorsed reference points for what is reasonable. The four-stage mechanism is still analytically valid, but its constraining and enabling effects happen together rather than unidirectionally. The evidence from the six cases corroborates this conclusion: the same contradictions are visible across not only different sectors but in the case of retail across three cases differing in size, gender and business model. These findings also extend the framework of bounded rationality's extension. Analysis of the data suggests that the heuristics relevant to the Kazakhstani owners of SMEs are not individual but socially distributed. As decisions are always uncertain, entrepreneurs reduce this uncertainty by drawing on the judgments of family, trusted contacts, a co-founding sibling, a small team, and other community members. The act of seeking advice fulfills a cognitive task that serves as a complement to bounded rationality, and it connects to the role of collective mental models in simplifying the complexity of decision environments (Loasby, 1998). According to P5, reliance on his brother and the store teams that he has been able to assemble, and according to P6, reliance on his older brother, illustrates that the socially distributed character of planning extends from the kin group to the firm. Trust in a small team is part of what makes risk-taking feel manageable. The findings, as discussed in Williams and Vorley's (2015) concept of institutional asymmetry,

demonstrate that when formal support does not match informal expectation, it is usually informal expectation – about failure, reputation, family responsibility and social visibility – that most directly enters the decision process. Formal institutions remain relevant; they are still the support coordinates but their effect gets filtered through the entrepreneur's informal environment.

The results also contribute to discussions on post-Soviet and emerging-market entrepreneurship. In the existing literature, the informal institutional environment is often seen as something that hinders. The present findings add complexity to this view. Social norms create real costs through shame, family pressure and exposure but also form trust networks, informal labour and a world of reputation based opportunity. P6's explicit framing of risk through honour (намыс) and communal identity is instructive here: the same normative concept that could make a bold or unconventional decision feel socially dangerous is also the concept that makes being relied on, persevering, and refusing to "give up" after failing socially prized. Policies that merely seek to eliminate or substitute informal institutions might destroy social capital on which the entrepreneurs actively rely. Formal and informal institutions have a relationship, this argument clarifies. Formal support programmes such as those delivered through Damu, Atameken, and Baiterek can reduce the cost of capital, provide training or improve access to information but do not, by themselves, change entrepreneurs' perceptions of the social consequences of failure. An entrepreneur may have access to a loan but may still choose not to expand if a public failure would negatively impact the family's reputation or cause social embarrassment. On the other hand, a backer with limited formal support will still take a risk if family labour, trusted clients, a reliable team, or community legitimacy help lessen uncertainty. Thus, while formal and informal institutions complement each other, the question is not whether entrepreneurs require formal or informal support but rather how their special decisions interact. The results regarding reputation as economic capital are particularly relevant with respect to SME support and financial inclusion, and the retail cases sharpen these results. In the event that

reputation acts as an informal substitute for formal credit-information systems, and if it increasingly works through platform-linked visibility – P5's "30 stores' worth of reach," P6's reliance on Instagram, P1's and P4's dependence on ratings and reviews – then policy should methodically think about not just how entrepreneurs accumulate and protect reputational capital but also how a digitised platform dynamic, now, mediates that.

The capital possessed along with risks related In the same way, the case of P1 indicates that the gendered ambivalence of family suggests support directed at women entrepreneurs should take into account not merely access to finance, but also asymmetric domestic obligations which shape how much risk they can. The analytical significance of the gendered implication remains but it is better treated as a cautionary caveat than as a population-level claim because the evidence is based on one especially rich case within a small exploratory sample in which P1 is the only woman. The two additional retail cases, both male, voice gendered descriptive stereotypes about men's and women's business styles, but do not bear on the household-obligation mechanism and are not used to support it.

6. CONCLUSION

In Kazakhstan, the owners of small SMEs weigh risks differently than in other contexts. As norms shape the way entrepreneurs perceive their decision to be socially dangerous, social structures simultaneously mediate that risk. Those structures then enable owners of risk-laden decisions by supplying the necessary trust, advice, capital, and legitimacy to carry through with a socially risky decision. As such, the article proposes that norms mediate the risk-taking of owners. So that while risk may be structurally contingent, it is not necessarily culturally so. In other words, the binding effect of norms and social structures is to decide how risks will take shape rather than whether they will be taken at all. Grounded in Simon's bounded rationality theory and North's institutional theory, the study designed and tested a four-stage analytical mechanism Social Norms → Perceived Social Consequences → Risk Perception Entrepreneurial Decision-Making using qualitative material from six deemed owner-managers from various cities and five sectors, with retail featuring three contrasting cases. Four main themes emerged from the analysis: Failure as a financial and psychological experience; family as constraint and resource; Reputation as economic capital; and risk-taking as planned learning under bounded rationality. The main contribution of this paper is to demonstrate the ambivalent functioning of informal norms in the Kazakhstanian entrepreneurship context. Trust, advice, reputational structures, capital, labour, and discipline rely on kinship, communities and organisations and facilitate taking calculated risks and creating enterprises. This is likely to argue against one-dimensional accounts of informal institutions as merely obstructive or merely facilitative, and instead indicate the need for a more context-sensitive understanding of how culture and social structure shape entrepreneurship in post-Soviet emerging-market economies. The replication within sectors evidenced in the three retail cases strengthens the case: the mechanism is not an artefact of comparing unlike sectors but recurs even among similar businesses of the same broad type with scale, gender, and model differences. Entrepreneurial risk can't be interpreted in isolation from the social relationships in

which entrepreneurs are embedded. This point is of particular importance in Kazakhstan where business decisions are often inseparable from family obligation, reputation, and community expectation. Three adjustments refine the key argument. Initially, embeddedness can assumedly be gendered. The case of P1 suggests that the balance between family-as-support and family-as-obligation can depend on who is projected as the bearer of household responsibility. Such reading is consistent with.

Women entrepreneurs in transition economies (Iakovleva et al., 2013), although it rests here on a single rich case and should be treated as a proposition for further research rather than as a generalisable finding. In the case of younger retail entrepreneurs, the older brother (аға) recurs as a specific advisory figure distinct from generic "family." Reputation-as-capital, third, increasingly works in the platform-mediated digital visibility, notably evident in the retail and hospitality cases. These refinements indicate that the allocation of resources and restrictions originating from families, as well as the directions via which reputations get established and endangered, are neither uniform nor non-gendered.

7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study are qualified by several limitations. The interpretive qualitative research found mechanism types under Kazakhstani conditions. The six participant sample was sufficient to provide insights of these process mechanisms types, but without a high level of assurance that the specific mechanisms might not be more prevalent or concentrated in other parts of the Kazakhstani SME population. It may also be the case that full thematic saturation, in the strict sense, was not achieved, which implies that the themes are more generative than definite in terms of their general applicability. Second, now weighted toward retail, three out of the six cases are retail businesses. The researchers made a design choice to enable replication within the same sector. As a result, construction, fish processing and hospitality are each represented by a single case. The retail angle is important to bear in mind when interpreting the cross-sector claims. For one thing, all participants are current entrepreneurs, which creates a survivorship bias: people who exited business because of social-norm pressures, or who never entered in the first place because of family or reputational constraints, are not present. This bias applies especially to the constraint side of the ambivalence argument. Since norm constrained entrepreneurs are least likely to appear in a sample of surviving owners, they are the ones most heavily constrained. For one, there is only one woman (P1) in the sample, and the gendered-ambivalence arrangement rests on one lived account; it should therefore be read as a hypothesis for future research, not a finding. The analyses of the five interviews have yielded 5 unique findings. It is worth mentioning that only selective quotes are provided and one case (P6) is reported through a paraphrase, therefore, some interpretation rests on analytical paraphrase and repeated audio review rather than fully reproduced transcript extracts. The sixth influence is the researcher's cultural closeness to the field. This allows for some interpretive advantage as well as some risk through over-identification. To combat this, reflexive journaling and noting counter-interpretations were done by the author. However, complete alleviation was not possible. The study took place at a particular point in time. Furthermore, this

squeezes our ability to investigate how norms and risk perception develops over an entrepreneurial career.

Future studies must widen the empirical evidence base using larger samples representing countries, fields, regions, and demographic groups. More particularly, future studies should attend to issues of gender balance and to entrepreneurs based outside the big cities. Since the current study focuses exclusively on single woman, a focused study of women SME owners would be particularly useful for directly testing the gendered-ambivalence proposition. Using the four-stage framework may be deployed comparative work in other Central Asian and post-Soviet contexts that would test transferability of the mechanism and advance the wider project of contextualising entrepreneurship theory for transition economies. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods would allow the proposed mechanism to be tested across sectors and regions. The findings lead to four realistic recommendations. To begin, policymakers must realize how informal reputational institutions have great economic value including their increasingly digital, platform-mediated form. Next, they should think of mechanisms that will allow entrepreneurs to formalize and leverage reputational capital in formal market interactions. An example will be community-based credit-guarantee schemes. Such schemes will use existing reputational networks as social collateral. The second recommendation is that entrepreneurship education through universities and business incubators needs to explicitly tackle the social and emotional dimensions of risk-taking, specifically failure stigma, family negotiation and reputation management. It also needs to draw on the case-based discussion of real local businesses rather than depending solely on abstract business-plan models. Moreover, banks should focus on designing products that properly reflect the family-based structure of the many Kazakhstan SMEs. Additionally, banks could also assign greater weight in the credit assessment to relational assets. This would include repeat customers, supplier trust, as well as local and digital reputation, though with controls remaining formal in nature. Various support programs which are provided through

institutions such as Damu, Atameken and Baiterek could have some peer-support networks who would chat about their failure, debt, and family pressure in a safe setting. It would help to normalise learning from mistakes and lessen the isolation of entrepreneurial difficulty. Though tentative, these recommendations follow.

A look at the study's main findings can be instructive: the entrepreneurial risk in Kazakhstan is not only financial.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Aidis, R., Estrin, S., & Mickiewicz, T. (2008). Institutions and entrepreneurship development in Russia: A comparative perspective. Journal of Business Venturing, 23(6), 656–672.

Aldrich, H. E., & Cliff, J. E. (2003). The pervasive effects of family on entrepreneurship: Toward a family embeddedness perspective. Journal of Business Venturing, 18(5), 573–596.

Bicchieri, C. (2006). The grammar of society: The nature and dynamics of social norms. Cambridge University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 13(2), 201–216.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. SAGE Publications.

Brinkmann, S. (2013). Qualitative interviewing. Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2016). Social research methods (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Busenitz, L. W., & Barney, J. B. (1997). Differences between entrepreneurs and managers in large organizations: Biases and heuristics in strategic decision-making. Journal of Business Venturing, 12(1), 9–30.

Cardon, M. S., Stevens, C. E., & Potter, D. R. (2011). Misfortunes or mistakes? Cultural sensemaking of entrepreneurial failure. Journal of Business Venturing, 26(1), 79–92.

Cialdini, R. B., & Trost, M. R. (1998). Social influence: Social norms, conformity and compliance. In D. T.

Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), The handbook of social psychology (4th ed., Vol. 2, pp. 151–192). McGraw-Hill.

Dave, B. (2007). Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, language and power. Routledge.

Estrin, S., Meyer, K. E., & Bytchkova, M. (2006). Entrepreneurship in transition economies. In M. Casson, B.

Yeung, A. Basu, & N. Wadeson (Eds.), The Oxford handbook of entrepreneurship (pp. 693–725). Oxford University Press.

Gigerenzer, G., & Goldstein, D. G. (1996). Reasoning the fast and frugal way: Models of bounded rationality. Psychological Review, 103(4), 650–669.

Helmke, G., & Levitsky, S. (2004). Informal institutions and comparative politics: A research agenda. Perspectives on Politics, 2(4), 725–740.

Iakovleva, T., Solesvik, M., & Trifilova, A. (2013). Financial availability and government support for women entrepreneurs in transitional economies: Cases of Russia and Ukraine. Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development, 20(2), 314–340.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. SAGE Publications.

Loasby, B. J. (1998). The organisation of capabilities. Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, 35(2), 139–160.

McKeever, E., Jack, S., & Anderson, A. (2015). Embedded entrepreneurship in the creative re-construction of place. Journal of Business Venturing, 30(1), 50–65.

North, D. C. (1990). Institutions, institutional change and economic performance. Cambridge University Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). Qualitative research and evaluation methods (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Roland, G. (2004). Understanding institutional change: Fast-moving and slow-moving institutions. Studies in Comparative International Development, 38(4), 109– 131.

Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (2nd ed., pp. 189–213). SAGE Publications.

Simon, H. A. (1955). A behavioral model of rational choice. Quarterly Journal of Economics, 69(1), 99–118.

Simon, H. A. (1957). Models of man: Social and rational. Wiley.

Simon, M., Houghton, S. M., & Aquino, K. (2000). Cognitive biases, risk perception, and venture formation: How individuals decide to start companies. Journal of Business Venturing, 15(2), 113–134.

Smallbone, D., & Welter, F. (2012). Entrepreneurship and institutional change in transition economies: The Commonwealth of Independent States, Central and Eastern Europe and China compared. Entrepreneurship and Regional Development, 24(3–4), 215–233.

Smallbone, D., Welter, F., Voytovich, A., & Egorov, I. (2010). Government and entrepreneurship in transition economies: The case of small firms in business services in Ukraine. The Service Industries Journal, 30(5), 655–670.

Welter, F. (2011). Contextualizing entrepreneurship: Conceptual challenges and ways forward. Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 35(1), 165–184.

Welter, F., & Smallbone, D. (2011). Institutional perspectives on entrepreneurial behavior in challenging environments. Journal of Small Business Management, 49(1), 107–125.

Williams, N., & Vorley, T. (2015). Institutional asymmetry: How formal and informal institutions affect entrepreneurship in Bulgaria. International Small Business Journal, 33(8), 840–861.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A — INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Study title: Social Norms and Entrepreneurial Risk-Taking: Informal Constraints and Enabling Resources among Small Business Owners in Kazakhstan Researcher: Serikov Assylkhan | Supervisor: Ugur Choban Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate. The purpose of this study is to understand how social and cultural factors influence business decision-making among SME owners in Kazakhstan. Participation is voluntary; you may skip any question or stop the interview at any time. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. Your identity will be protected through a participant code.

Section 1 — Opening / Background

• Could you tell me about yourself and your business?

• What motivated you to start your own business?

Section 2 — Risk and Decision-Making

• Can you describe a significant business decision that involved risk?

• What factors do you usually consider before taking a risky business decision?

• How do you gather information before making such decisions?

Section 3 — Social and Family Dimensions

• How important is your family's opinion in your business decisions?

• Have you ever changed a decision because of family, friends, or community expectations?

• How important is reputation for your business, and how do you manage it?

Section 4 — Failure and Learning

• Have you experienced a significant business setback or failure?

• How did the people around you respond?

• How did the experience affect your approach to risk?

Section 5 — Closing

• Is there anything else you would like to add about how your social environment shapes your business decisions?

APPENDIX B — PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

This study is conducted for a Master's dissertation at SDU University. The research examines how social norms, family expectations, reputation, and failure experiences shape entrepreneurial risk-taking among SME owners in Kazakhstan. Participation is voluntary. Participants may decline to answer any question and may withdraw from the interview at any time. Interviews are used only for academic purposes. Participant identities are anonymised using the codes P1–P6; business names and identifying personal information are not disclosed in the dissertation. Audio recordings, interview memos, and translated excerpts are stored securely and will be destroyed after completion of the research project.

APPENDIX C — CONSENT FORM

Participant code: _____ Date: _____

☐ I confirm that I have been informed about the purpose of the study.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may stop the interview at
any time.

☐ I give permission for the interview to be audio-recorded for academic analysis.

☐ I understand that my identity will be anonymised in the dissertation and related
research outputs.

☐ I understand that selected translated excerpts from my interview may be used
anonymously.

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D — CODING FRAMEWORK AND THEMATIC MAP

The coding framework was developed through reflexive thematic analysis. Initial codes were grouped into broader analytical categories and then refined into four final themes. Coding was conducted in two passes: an inductive first pass identifying patterns in the data and a deductive second pass checking the four-stage analytical mechanism against the interview material. The framework developed from the first four interviews was subsequently tested against the two additional retail cases (P5, P6).

Table 3.1 Coding Framework and Thematic Map

Code group	Examples of codes	Final theme
Social norms	family expectations; community judgement; gendered responsibility; honour (намыс); sibling advisory authority	Family as constraint and resource
Perceived social consequences	fear of shame; reputational damage; social approval; loss of trust	Failure as financial and psychological experience
Risk perception	fear of debt; uncertainty; psychological readiness; confidence	Risk-taking as planned learning
Decision behaviour	delaying expansion; consulting family/sibling; staged risk-taking; protecting reputation; shifting to online platforms	Reputation as economic capital
Enabling networks	family labour; advice; team trust; reputation-based customer loyalty; platform reach	Ambivalence of informal norms (cross-cutting)

APPENDIX E — SELECTED ANONYMISED INTERVIEW EXCERPTS

The following excerpts were selected because they directly support the four themes discussed in Chapter 3. They were translated into English and lightly edited for clarity while preserving meaning. Original audio recordings are retained securely and can be inspected by the defence committee in accordance with SDU guidelines. In line with Section 2.8, verbatim quotations are presented for cases whose wording was verified against the audio; the menswear case (P6) is reported in Chapter 3 through analytical paraphrase and is therefore not represented here by verbatim excerpts.

P1 — Retail / e-commerce (Shymkent) "If a person can overcome their fear and build confidence in themselves regarding risk-taking, then success will surely follow, because fear stands behind risk-taking."

"I have many tasks balancing children, home, and household. All of this makes it impossible to give one hundred per cent attention to the business sometimes." "If a person has sufficient knowledge in their chosen field of business, that person will be more confident in taking risks."

P2 — Construction (Almaty / Dubai) "For me, it means a new opportunity — moving to the next stage, the next time. Failure taught me something." "The family's role is very important. I combine my own knowledge and experience with their advice to make a decision." "Without risk, you cannot achieve great success. Moving to Dubai — I made this major decision with the full support and counsel of my family."

P3 — Fish processing (Astana / Shardara) "Because of that strictness, because of that discipline — that discipline stuck with us too. Because discipline is the most important thing." "If you lose confidence in your business, your business dies. If you don't believe in it yourself, no one else will believe in it." "If revenue does not come in, the company's operations and the workers' salaries are at risk. So sometimes we are forced to take risks."

P4 — Hospitality / café (Zhezkazgan) "Don't give in to emotions. Make a plan, cut through obstacles, strengthen yourself. Research and learning first — that's the most important thing."

P5 — Retail / floral chain (Almaty / Astana / Shymkent) "In the first year we had losses. This came from unforeseen situations. For example, goods come from suppliers, but when the goods arrive, you've already sold them on credit, and by the time you need to pay, you don't have the money."

“After the loss with the peonies, we thought about it, tried different approaches. We were psychologically affected, but we didn’t give up. We learned from it and moved forward with a different strategy.” “Family factors strongly influence me. When we opened the store, we opened it with my older brother. First, I was uncertain. My brother was skeptical about certain decisions we made.” “The family didn’t understand much. They didn’t know the details. It was difficult. But the family supported us.” “Now online sales are growing, offline stores are struggling. Rent costs are rising, and many stores can’t handle it. That’s why everyone is moving to online sales.” “If we work with platforms like Kaspi, we could have 30 stores’ worth of reach. Our network expanded through online platforms.” “The more risk, the more profit. But we need stability and long-term planning, not just quick cash flow.”

P6 — Retail / menswear (Almaty) Reported through analytical paraphrase (see Section 2.8). Principal coded content: the older brother (аға) as principal advisor with the majority of any decision retained personally; family and friends as moral support; Instagram as the primary platform for building the business and managing reputation; risk understood as courage combined with preparation, framed explicitly through honour (намыс) and communal and religious identity; and seasonal unpreparedness identified as the principal operational risk. The honour-based framing of risk is treated as an interpretive translation of an indigenous normative concept rather than a fixed one-word equivalent.

APPENDIX F — REPORT OF UNIQUENESS

Researcher: Serikov Assylkhan
Dissertation Title: Social Norms and Entrepreneurial Risk-Taking: Informal Constraints and Enabling Resources among Small Business Owners in Kazakhstan
Scientific Supervisor: Ugur Choban
Date of uniqueness check: _____
Uniqueness percentage: _____
Software used: _____
I confirm that the above-named dissertation has been checked for originality using the indicated software and achieves a uniqueness score meeting the required threshold of ≥70%.

Signature of supervisor: _____
Date: _____